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# THE *NKUMU* OF THE TUMBA

## RITUAL CHIEFTAINSHIP ON THE MIDDLE CONGO

*H. D. BROWN*

THE tribes living round Lake Tumba, a lake some thirty-five miles long by twelve wide lying north of Lake Leopold II (approximately 0° 30′ south latitude, and 18° east longitude) and draining into the Congo River at the confluence of the Ubangi, lack cohesion and show a considerable variety of custom and language. But they are known collectively as Tumba, the Government adaptation of the Native term *Ntomba*. Most of them are found to the east of the lake, the whole group numbering perhaps little more than forty to fifty thousand at the present time, though there is evidence that the last twenty years have seen a great decrease in population. European occupation of this area goes back barely fifty years, Protestant missions having been established for about the same length of time. The first mission post was established at Ikoko on the north-east shore of the lake, one of the villages of a group known as Bonginda. In pursuing this investigation particular attention has been given to the practices of this group, but mention is occasionally made where considerable differences have been found elsewhere.

The Tumba are agricultural, hunting, and fishing people. Their country is flat and swampy with dense forests, and there are many watercourses flowing into Lake Tumba. There are occasional small, less swampy plains, and one such area, more open, with quite wide stretches of prairie, is a haunt of buffalo. The forests are fairly wel supplied with game, and the swamps, streams, and lakes with fish. A heavy rainfall and no distinct dry season make agriculture reasonably easy and famine unknown. Every family has its plantation of manioc, the staple diet, which is supplemented by plantains and bananas. The people make their own tools, formerly smelting their own iron for this purpose, are fairly skilful at making dug-out canoes, engage in weaving raffia and making mats out of split cane, and are efficient at pottery production.

The role of the *nkumu* in the socio-religious activities of the community is one of the most interesting features of Tumba life. As a result of European contact the ceremonies connected with the *nkumu* are rapidly disappearing, but it has been possible to collect considerable information from the older men and women among whom the details are still vividly remembered.[1] The following report refers to the period previous to European occupation and control, a time within the memory of a large number of people, but already sufficiently remote to become a matter of hearsay before the lapse of many more years.

An understanding of the place of the *nkumu* among the Tumba requires a glance at the tribal organization. According to the people themselves, they migrated westward, and coming into these parts chose land for themselves. Among the several

[1] In *My Children of the Forest*, New York, 1924, pp. 48–51, Andrew F. Hensey has briefly outlined some of the items of interest observed among the *nkumu* of the district adjacent to that of the present study. These more detailed notes are, however, timely if a record is to be preserved that approximates to accuracy.

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596 invading groups of kinsfolk there was always one who was considered as the family head, and this man could claim the title of *momene mokonda*, the owner of the land. Round this man the rest of the members of the family group clustered, and he had the general direction of their affairs. He could scarcely be termed a chief, having a paternal oversight rather than exercising any wide authority demanding organizing ability and political astuteness. The succession of *momene mokonda* runs collaterally through younger brothers in the first place; hence if a first-born male happens to hold that position, the succession among his younger brothers is in the order of their birth. When these have all died the succession passes to the next generation. If all the males of a group die, it is possible for a daughter's son to leave his father's side in order to assume the position of *momene mokonda* on his mother's side.

A *momene mokonda* can delegate his duties as head to another member of the family, who is then termed *molomi o ehe*, the husband of the settlement. For such a privilege payment is generally made to the *momene mokonda*. Round these *momene mokonda* and their immediate kinsmen others gathered, forming, it may be, another section of the same settlement, known then as an *etuka*, or, if numerous, another settlement.[1]

624 The *momene mokonda* (or *molomi o ehe*) hears and judges cases that come to him, aided always by a group of elders, and directs the activities of the settlement. However,
[693] this does not entirely satisfy the Tumba; they want an *nkumu* also. The *nkumu* is chosen, not by the whole settlement, but by a single village, or it may be even one *etuka* of a village. If the villages of a settlement were without an *nkumu* it would generally, but not necessarily, be the *etuka* of the *momene mokonda* which would lead off by seeking one out. The group desiring an *nkumu* are known as the *molembe*, and they look about for a man of the same tribe but not of the same settlement or village, an outsider. He must be a man of some wealth, for actually he will buy his right of authority and pay heavily for it. If the man who is approached accepts, he is known from then on until his accession as *Nkema Akuke*, the term *nkumu* not being used until he is finally invested with the insignia of office, the *montolo*, or hat of special design. *Nkema Akuke*'s family is known as the *ekopo*, or *mango*. This man,
[556] once having accepted the invitation to become *nkumu*, sets about amassing wealth in the form of wives and brass rods. He may be years about it, but he does not thereby forfeit his right to the office, nor apparently weary those who extended the invitation. Should *Nkema Akuke* die before he is installed as *nkumu*, or should he wish to withdraw from the honour bestowed upon him, the succession passes to another member of his *ekopo*. The succession would normally pass to the eldest male of the *ekopo*,
[787] but many circumstances may interfere to give it to another member of the family. A dream dreamed by a male of the *ekopo* to the effect that he should be the *nkumu* is sufficient to give him the right of succession over the eldest male. When asked
[689] whether it was common to lie about such a dream having occurred, in order to gain the right of succession, those questioned received the suggestion with emphatic negatives, for this is no time to lie; any man so doing would be sure to die, and the fear of death would deter him from such baseness.

[1] Where practical, the invested chiefs set up by the Belgian Colonial Government are men chosen because of their right to be known as *momene mokonda* or *molomi o ehe*. Often, however, the settlements are so small and lacking in cohesion that it has been necessary to set up chiefs arbitrarily over chieftaincies very much larger then were their own hereditary spheres of influence.

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fear of death would deter him from such baseness. Another sign of the chosen successor is some untoward experience, such, for example, as finding cowrie shells (worn by *nkumu*) in a trap in the forest or a net that had been put out to catch fish.

*Nkema Akuke*, whether the first of his line or a man succeeding in the office, bears the emblems of his rank. He wears an *ilolembe* (a branch of a special bush) stuck into his belt on the right side and hanging downwards. The special hat, *montolo*, worn by *nkumu* is not yet his to wear, but he wears an ordinary skin hat known as *lopopo*, which is the mark of any elder. This hat may be ornamented with feathers if so desired.

When *Nkema Akuke* decides that he has acquired sufficient wealth to enable him properly to claim the right of being made an *nkumu*, he begins his preparatory arrangements. *Mbili*, a mixture of charcoal with some sticky substance, is smeared over his body with plantain leaves. All ornamented clothing is discarded and a single cloth woven from raffia, and known as *molele*, is worn. He refuses to sit on the benches usually used and instead sits on the bare earth. All this is explained as an attempt on the part of the man about to be raised to the office of *nkumu* to be different from others, a man apart, separate, peculiar, not partaking in the ordinary interests and affairs of his fellow men.

*Nkema Akuke* now leaves his own village accompanied by all his wives and children, and also by a singer, *nyemba*, who is paid to sing his praises, and by several male Batwa (pygmies), up to half a dozen in number, known as *ntotii* because of their duty of blowing gourds and producing sounds which indicate praise of the great man. This party makes the round of villages wherever relatives are found, and the announcement is made that *Nkema Akuke* is about to become an *nkumu*. This pilgrimage accomplished, a 'doctor' (*nkanga*) is visited by the aspirant to office, who seeks by magic to discover whether it is the propitious time for the ceremony of installation. The whole company retires to the private enclosure at the rear of the house belonging to the *nkanga* chosen, this being the place where he performs his wonders. The *nkanga* resorts to *nsingo*, that particular branch of magic which has to do with reasons for strange and unaccountable phenomena.[1] *Nkema Akuke* now seeks some sign as confirmation of his determination to claim his office at this time. Some native pepper may be wrapped in a leaf or merely covered by it, and left within sight of all, and upon being opened it may be found to have turned into salt, or perhaps it may be some earth that is thus turned to salt. Or a cock may be placed upon *Nkema Akuke's* head and covered with a basket and thus left for some time. Upon removing the basket it may be discovered that an egg has been laid. All such tests, if successful, will be regarded as indications that it really is time for *Nkema Akuke* to assume the office of *nkumu*, but if the test fails he will usually go ahead with his plans anyhow, fearing the shame that would come to him should he go back to his home after having made the triumphant round of his relatives' homes. However, should he act thus, and he most certainly will, he knows that his days are numbered,

[1] If a man's fields do not produce and he cannot understand why, he will resort to *nsingo*. If it is suspected, for example, that the trouble is caused by someone making 'medicine', an arrow shaft is put into a small hole in the ground, and at each name mentioned, the arrow can be pulled out if the person is innocent, but remains stuck fast in the hole at the mention of the guilty name.

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624 and that he may have no more than a month or perhaps a year in which to live and will surely die speedily.

The special objects attaching to the office of *nkumu*, among these the hat, *montolo*, and stool, *mbata*, are at the same time subject to similar magical arts to determine whether they may be produced for the new *nkumu*'s use. They are not present, being in the possession of the *molembe* which will appoint him, but are mentioned by name. Apart from the *montolo*, no further ceremony is required to identify these objects with their future owner.

[309] The *mingo* ended, the *Nkema Akuke* smears black *mbili* all over his body again, 624 before the rites begin to determine which of his wives is to be known as *Nsono*, 787 the one who will be closest to her husband throughout his days. For this, magic formulae (*bienzako*, sing. *eenzako*) are used. All the wives sit round in a circle and the *nkanga* places some irritant such as ground pepper in the eyes of all the women. The wife whose eyes stream most and whose discomfort is also accompanied by a violent shaking of the body is known to be *Nsono*. Here again, lying is believed to be out [827] of the question, for the shaking of the body is something that is supposed to be impossible of simulation, the real being easily distinguished by all from the false. *Nsono* is now stripped of all clothing and her body smeared by the *nkanga* with yellow clay on one side, and with white on the other. A belt of leaves is put round her waist 624 and a small bit of cloth between the legs with each end attached to the belt. Near by 789 a gourd with 'medicine' in it has been standing ready for the next step in the ceremonies, and this is now smeared with white clay, a parrot's feather stuck in the neck, and handed to *Nsono*, who receives it in one hand. Into the other hand is put a section of plantain stalk, into one end of which has been stuck a parrot's feather. A third feather is placed in her mouth so that she cannot speak, greet anyone, or eat. She is now tied with a cord which is held by one of the young men attending *Nkema Akuke*. At this point of the procedure the *nkanga* states his price [791 for his work, which will be in the neighbourhood of one hundred brass rods, worth 435] to-day about fifty francs, but formerly double that amount. The future *nkumu*, accompanied as before, leaves for the village of the *molembe*. *Nsono* starts off at a tremendous pace, for she is now imbued with a sort of frenzied strength, and for this reason has been tied up and put in charge of a strong young man, otherwise she would be off so fast that no one could catch her, and would go into the forest, where she would live for days unseen.

624 In the village of the *molembe* the party all sit in an *ebanga* belonging to one of the elders. This is the place where the Tumba men really live—their houses are just [343 sleeping and cooking establishments, but the *ebanga*, having a roof for shade and no 342] walls, is the place where the men congregate and spend their leisure time. It is also the site of the village smithy, which takes up one end. Here, then, *Nkema Akuke* and [262] his party sit for a day and a night, and neither he nor *Nsono* may eat food or drink wine during this period. Games are played by the *molembe*—mock battles, dances, and [517] songs chiefly of battle, and before the first streaks of dawn appear the group in the *ebanga* begins to march up and down the village singing.

At dawn the whole party, accompanied by a large crowd, make their way to a place in the bush where there is an elevation of some sort. Here *Nkema Akuke* climbs up and takes his stand, accompanied by *Nsono*. Now the *molembe* choose the *Bilepo*

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*Mantolo*, the hat worn by the *nkumu* as the symbol of his office

[facing page 434]

Now the molembe choose the Bilopo



624 *Okoke*, a young woman of their own number, who will thereafter be known by this
[533] name. She is an official cymbalist and must always begin beating before others may join in. In reality the members of the *molembe* have decided beforehand who shall be chosen for this position, and the woman of their choice now takes her stand on the elevation together with *Nkema Akuke* and his wife, *Nsomo*.

624 The member of the *molembe* whose right it is by inheritance to place the *montolo*
292 (see Plates) upon the head of the *nkumu* now comes forward with it. This hat, about twelve inches in height, is woven of raffia and cylindrical in shape, but the brim, instead of being at the base, encircles the top of the crown. It is usually decorated with a burnished brass plate attached to the front, and perhaps a second one behind, and in these modern days it is quite in style to hang a row of safety pins from the 'brim' or 'halo' encircling the crown. When the *nkumu* is the first of his line, the *montolo* is purchased by him, but in the case of succession it is that used by the deceased predecessor, and has been kept by the *molembe* until this time. It is his badge of office and sign of authority. The bringing out of the *montolo* is an occasion for
624 merriment. *Nkema Akuke* calls for his *montolo*, but the *molembe* tease and tantalize him and ask for money. The amount is a fixed sum, but *Nkema Akuke* pays out at first but a few rods, is teased for more, and so on until he has provided the total amount, usually about one hundred. The member of the *molembe* whose duty it is to place the *montolo* on the head of the *nkumu* begins to tease the crowd. He chooses various names by which the *nkumu* might be called, everybody knowing all the time what his name must be. He asks the people, 'Shall we call him so-and-so?' 'We refuse', reply the people. 'Or so-and-so?' 'We refuse.' And each time names whereby *nkumu* are known are repeated. Finally the correct name is given, as, 'Shall we call him *Nkumu Lobondola*?' and the crowd roars its approval, 'Ooooo!' The *montolo* then being placed on *Nkema Akuke*'s head he now becomes *Nkumu* and leaps down among the crowd, who bear him off to their village with rejoicing. In the choice of names, the first *nkumu* in a village is known as *Nkumu Lobondola*. If there is another section of the village with an *nkumu* of its own, he must take another name, such as *Nkumu Iyeli Bokonga*. Successors must always take the names of their predecessors whatever their own personal names may be. An *nkumu* chosen by a *molembe*
[554] which is also the *momene mokonda*, the hereditary owner of the land, is known as *Nkumu e Bitindi* (*Nkumu* of the heels), for he occupies a more important position than his fellows, and is thus the support which holds up the whole group of *nkumu* chosen by other *molembe*.

624 The *nkumu* is borne off to his *nongo*, his residence, which in this case is temporary,
342 to be replaced later by a permanent one. The *nongo* comprises the whole unit of buildings for the *nkumu*, including his own sleeping quarters, the houses for his wives, the *ebanga* where he spends the daylight hours, and a row of houses for his children. His *ebanga* and his own sleeping quarters are screened from the public gaze, making
[351] a place known as *ipana*. In the case of a new *nkumu* the screen is temporary, but when the permanent *nongo* is built, a permanent *ipana* is made by planting umbrella trees (*molembe*, sing. *molembe*) in a rectangular or circular fashion. Here, sheltered
624 from intrusion, the *nkumu* remains in retirement (*auli*) for a month.[1] While he remains

[1] *Auli* refers to the sitting of a hen on eggs, *nkumu* at this juncture of the ceremonies. the seclusion of a woman after childbirth, or of the

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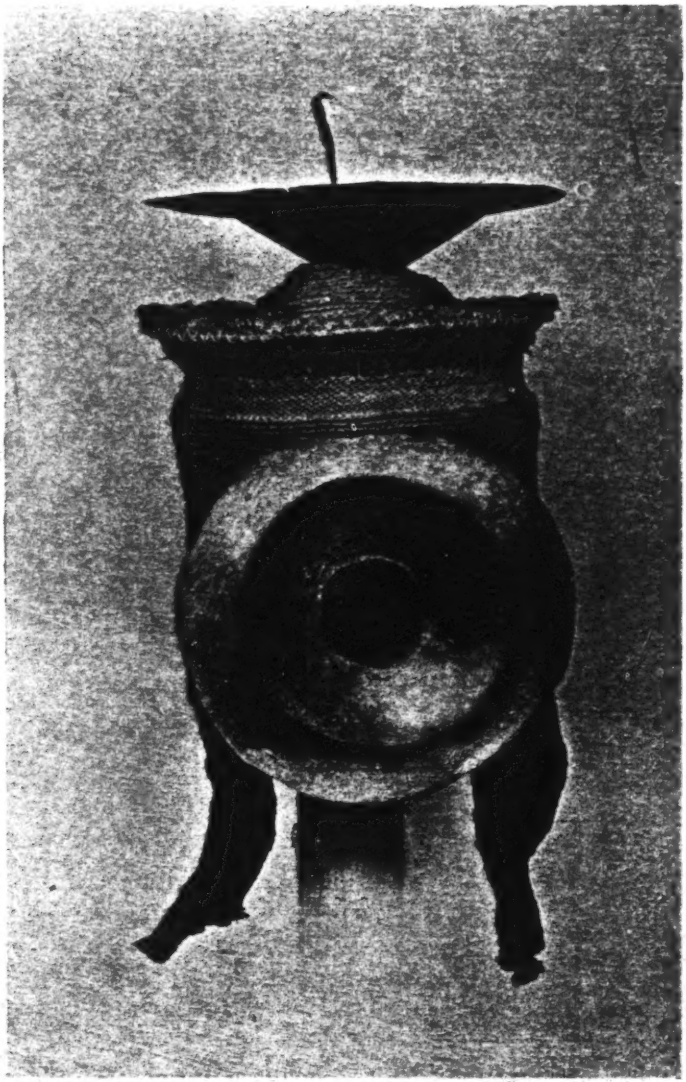

*Mwtalo*, the hat worn by the *nkumw* as the symbol of his office

[facing page 435]

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624 thus, *Nsono* is a very prominent figure. Still arrayed as previously described, she sits outside the *nongo* near the road on the special stool of the *nkumu*. Nobody may pass her with food, a humane law, considering that she must spend the day fasting. If anyone attempts to do so she catches the unlucky individual, helps herself to as much of his food as she wants, the victim meanwhile begging her to be merciful and leave him a small portion, and the booty is taken into the *ipana*. During this sentinel duty *Nsono* must still keep the parrot's feather in her mouth and maintain silence, so, in case she catches an unsuspecting bearer of food, the remonstrance and argument are all one-sided.[1] After the first day *Nsono* no longer sits outside the *nongo* but goes from place to place in the village, choosing spots where people may least expect her, hoping thus to reap a bigger harvest for her pains. This is kept up for eight days, which comprise two Tumba 'weeks' of three days' work and one of rest. The rest-day is appropriately named *boina bo nsono* after the duty of *Nsono* of sitting doing nothing day by day. The eight days of this ceremony over, *Nsono* lays aside her gourd and plantain stalk, which are placed at the foot of the first central supporting post of the *ebanga* on entering. She is given a fresh coating of chalk and three coloured [302] stripes are drawn the length of her back and down her arms. She still remains close to the *nkumu*.

[567] Various personalities are connected with the *nongo* of an *nkumu*. The *Basele* is a male slave, clothed in a skin breech cloth, whose duty it is to receive callers at the *ipana* before admitting them to the presence of the *nkumu*.

624 595 *Mpenge* is the name taken by the wife first married by the *nkumu*. From henceforth she no longer accompanies her husband, and their cohabitation ceases unless the *nkumu* is willing to pay her each time the sum of one hundred rods. But the *nkumu* is obliged to eat all food she cooks for him even though they have a quarrel. *Mpenge* does not honour her husband with the special greeting accorded to *nkumu*, but greets her husband and all other *nkumu* as she would ordinary people.[2] The second wife of an *nkumu* must assume the name of *Iyombo Anganda*, but no importance attaches to her position.

624 516 Among the Tumba generally, apart from the Bonginda, a woman is chosen from the *molembe* to bear the title *Bolumbu Itina i Ekopo* (*Bolumbu*, the 'raison d'être' of the *ekopo*). She is, it would seem, a symbolical figure, a reminder that the *ekopo* owes its existence to the *molembe* of which this woman becomes the titular head. While the *nkumu* is still in seclusion the chosen woman is taken to the open space between the *ipana* and the row of sons' houses, known as the *nanda*. Here, in the presence of the assembled crowd she is praised by being addressed, '*Bolumbu Itina, bototo!*' and the crowd exclaims, '*Bwoo!*'[3] Strips of leopard skin, about eighteen

[845] [1] It is interesting to note that there are some exceptions to those who may be caught and robbed by *Nsono* during her eight days of watching. No member of the *molembe* may be thus treated, twins and their parents are exempt, and also all children born to the *nkumu* before he attains office, these being termed *maomi*.

[554 595] [2] Besides *Mpenge*, a mother of twins is also exempt from according *nkumu* special salutations, and among some groups the father of twins is also exempt.

[3] This ceremony gives husbands of any village, whether they are members of the *molembe* or not, the opportunity to single out a favourite wife for special honour, for at this time any woman may be given the name of *Bolumbu*, though not with the significant complement of *Itina i Ekopo*. The ceremony is similar, is performed at the *nanda*, but besides receiving the strips of leopard skin, she must be divested of all her clothing, a new *lombeo* and *mpongo* are then placed round her, and the strips of skin then attached to the new belt.

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inches long and two inches in width, numbering up to seven are brought and attached to the back of her *lombeo* by folding them over it.[1]

The first male child which was born to the *nkumu* before he acceded to the office is known as *Iyumi Nkui*. If he has none, then the right to this name passes to the first male child to be born to his younger brothers. Any child born on the day that the *nkumu* is given his *montolo* is also called *Iyumi*; if a male he will be *Mola Iyumi*, if a female, *Mpombo Iyumi*.[2] These children must not see the *nkumu* until they are old enough to know his name and greet him properly, and so they are taken to some village other than the one in which he has his residence. When such children are considered old enough to take up residence in the village of the *nkumu* it is an occasion for revelry, a big dance, *otoko*, is held, and there is a feast. The child, *Iyumi*, is brought to the village of the *nkumu* with rejoicing, and this is a signal for everybody desiring to do so to help himself to anything belonging to the *nkumu*. Goats and fowls may be killed and eaten, sugar-cane rooted up, bananas, plantains, and other crops growing near by seized for food. Because of this custom the *nkumu* will take precautions and send his livestock, at least, off to some other village in order not to lose more than he can help.[3]

The *nyemba*, the singer or singers, and the *ototi*, the praisers already mentioned, remain with the *nkumu* during his period of seclusion. Added to these is *otombo lokombi*, the bearer of the *lokombi*, a stringed instrument played with the fingers, similar to a bass viol in its general appearance.

Inside the *ipana* during the seclusion of the *nkumu*, few people have the right of entrance, but as one enters the *ekunga* where the daylight hours are spent, one finds the couch of the *nkumu* on the left and towards the rear. On the same side and towards the front are seated the *otombo lokombi* and the *nyemba*. *Nsomo*'s couch is to the right of, and parallel to, that of the *nkumu*, but still to the left of the centre posts. To the right of her couch is the fire in the centre, and beyond the fire on the right side is a couch for the *maomi*, likewise somewhat to the rear, with a space in front for the *ototi*.

The month's seclusion being completed, the *nkumu* prepares to buy the homage of the village. *Nsomo* gets rid of her decorative colours, and assumes ordinary attire, becoming like any other of the wives, and is ready to take up all the usual duties of a wife, whether in the garden or at the house. The people are called to come and render to the *nkumu* their homage and praise. The men come to the *ipana*, are admitted to the presence of their *nkumu* and seat themselves on the bare earth with their legs wide apart and facing him. They then, without uttering a word, greet him in the

[1] The *lombeo* is a belt which used to be worn by Tumba women encircling the buttocks, and this was used to attach their only garment, the *ekwe* among the Bonginda, this being a short loin cloth, or an *mpanga* among other groups, this being a woven cloth strip worn between the legs.

[2] When a new *nkumu* assumes office, one already in office will take this opportunity of getting more of his sons named *Iyumi*. He takes them to the *mokombe* of the new *nkumu*, and having placed a bracelet of cowrie shells on the right wrist, and sometimes one on the right ankle, asks the member of the *mokombe* whose right it is to give away the *montolo* to name these sons *Maomi* (pl. of '*Iyumi*'). This man will then take such a son, and presenting him to the people introduce him by giving him a name, and following with praise as, '*Our Iyumi Lomoe, hototo!*' and the crowd replies with the customary '*Boso!*'

[3] It is well to remember that not every individual bearing names associated with the institution of the *nkumu* is directly concerned with it. With the practice of 'resurrecting' dead relatives by naming new-born children after them, such names as these become widespread.

624 customary manner, with a double clap. They are told by the ***nkumu*** to repeat the salutation, and having done so may be asked to do it a third time. They are then 576 given a few rods in payment. If the ***nkumu*** sees some member of his own ***ekopo*** coming to greet him, he gives him special honour by ordering him to lie flat on his back instead of merely sitting, and at the end he gives him a larger gift of rods than the others receive. In this way the ***nkumu*** may pay out a great many rods to those who thus render him homage. Ordinarily a man will receive five or six, but one 624 specially honoured may be given as many as twenty. From the beginning the ***nkumu*** has to pay heavily for his honours, and only a wealthy man can hope to attain them. [556] For this reason a lawful successor, if not wealthy, may be glad to give up his rights to another more fortunate member of the ***ekopo***. Homage having been paid, word is sent out that the ***nkumu*** is about to come forth, and crowds begin to gather. A coat [302] of red camwood powder mixed with oil is smeared over the ***nkumu***, the brass plates are attached to his ***montolo***, and he is attired in all his finery. The crowd outside dances, and when tired sits on the ground to await the rest of the ceremony. Inside, [533] the ***lokombi*** begins to play, the ***nyemba*** to sing, and the Batwa ***ntotii*** to praise the ***nkumu*** by uttering an ululating sound. Accompanied by *Nsomo*, *Bilepo*, and the ***maomi***, the ***nkumu*** himself begins to dance. The temporary protecting screen round the ***ipana*** is pulled down, and he is seen by all. After his dance he retires again and the crowd disperses.

When *Nkema Akuke* becomes ***nkumu*** he changes everything possible so as to [481] become different from other men. Thus he assumes a different gait, a sort of bow-legged waddle, a different tone of voice, and it seems that under this influence even his facial features undergo a change. Accompanied by his retinue, he visits the various villages where he has friends and relatives in order to greet them. This over, the musicians wish to take their departure and are paid for their services by the ***nkumu***.

624 At the conclusion of these ceremonies the ***nkumu*** with his ***ekopo*** and the ***molembe*** negotiate concerning their obligations to one another. If the ***nkumu*** is the first of his 596 line, he and his ***ekopo*** are given land to cultivate, while succeeding ***nkumu*** simply take over the land originally accorded. The ***molembe*** call their ***nkumu*** their wife, and they 621 designate themselves husband. They thus reckon the relationship between ***molembe*** and ***ekopo*** to be that of husband and wife, and, as in an actual marriage, there must be an interchange of obligations performed in a spirit of harmony. Also, as in marriage a wife may be divorced, so an ***nkumu*** with his ***ekopo*** could be sent off to their home and the arrangement terminated. It not infrequently happened that as strangers the ***ekopo*** fell out with their hosts and if such a disagreement could not be righted they might be refunded the payments with which they had purchased their rights, and sent off home.

Among the reciprocal obligations of ***molembe*** and ***ekopo*** are included the sharing 224 of certain animals and birds killed in the hunt, among which are the leopard and 624 elephant. All killed, whether male or female, must be divided. Of certain other animals, including the wild pig, antelope, and buffalo, if a female, no portion is given, 621 if a male, the required portion is presented. These reciprocal obligations are limited 596 strictly to the ***ekopo*** and ***molembe***; if others outside of these groups wish to present the ***nkumu*** with meat to honour him or to curry favour, they may do so, but they are under

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no compulsion./ If one of the contracting parties fails to fulfil its pledges in this matter of giving part of the kill, or in anything else, the aggrieved party may call the council together. This consists not only of members of the *molembe* and *ekopo*, but of all elders of the village or villages connected with this particular one. The party judged in the wrong, whether *ekopo* or *molembe*, will be fined, the injured party receiving its share, and both parties will be charged to live together harmoniously and observe their contracts.

The power of the *nkumu* was apparently limited, and did not supersede that of the *momemu mokonda*. When trials came up, the aggrieved party might go either to the *momemu mokonda* or to the *nkumu*. If it was necessary to call the village elders together about it, both these authorities were present at the hearing. First the young men of the group were allowed to give their verdict, then the old men, after that *momemu mokonda* (or the *molomi o ehe*), and finally the *nkumu* was given the privilege of the last word. He would comment on the opinions of each of the judges, criticizing one young man, commending another, and then giving his own verdict, at which the group would assent by saying, 'Even so, grandfather'. The whole group of judges would then fix the fines, a double portion of which went to the *nkumu*.

The actual manual labour which an *nkumu* may do excludes anything endangering life or limb, or requiring agility and speed. He may clear the bush for his gardens: this is a man's work. He may take part in the building of his houses, but may do no high work, and, among the inland groups, it is the work of the Batwa to put the roof on for him. The *nkumu* may also prepare pitfalls for catching game, but cannot engage in any other type of hunting or do any fishing. Digging a grave is prohibited, for, as we shall see, everything pertaining to death must be ignored by the *nkumu*.

Other rules affecting the daily life of the *nkumu* may be roughly divided into three: those affecting his person, those having to do with his food, and social regulations.

One of the great points of observance in the first class of regulations is the importance of the *montolo*. The *nkumu* must on no account be seen during daylight hours with an uncovered head. If he wishes relief from the cumbersome *montolo* he may take it off in the darkness of his house and put on an ordinary hat made of skins, and when night falls he may walk where he will bareheaded if he so desires. The skin hat, known as *louku*, may be made from two animals only, in the case of an *nkumu*, one being the *nkulupa*, a species of antelope with light-coloured hair, and the other the *iyoko*, an animal resembling a beaver. The skin of the *nkulupa* may be used by anyone, but the *iyoko* is reserved for the *nkumu* only with one exception. The skin of the *iyoko* may also be used for the carrying strap for infants known as *nyambu*, which is worn over one shoulder in bandoleer fashion. For the *nkumu* the skin of the *iyoko* is limited to the informal hat, *louku*, and for making into the *lokoto*, a pouch used for carrying small objects and worn like a sporran. As a corollary to the importance of the *montolo* may be noted the importance attached to the head of the *nkumu*, which must never be seen uncovered in daylight.

The Bonginda *nkumu* never wash in the daytime, but may wash at night with hot water. The inland *nkumu* never wash. Even the Bonginda *nkumu* never wash their heads, and no *nkumu* ever cuts his hair. If the *nkumu* becomes too greatly inconvenienced, one of his wives may delouse his head, but only within the privacy of the house, by the light that enters the rear opening.

G24 An *nkumu* can never walk alone, but must always be accompanied by others, and
[481] on no occasion whatsoever may he run. Even though he never washes, if he is out
in the rain and sees everybody else hurrying for shelter, he will not quicken his pace.
[513] His movements must be slow and deliberate. The *nkumu* never sleeps alone; waking
and sleeping he is attended by someone. But apart from this he is free to go where he
wishes. The *nkumu* is not indiscriminate, as others may be, in his private habits, but
[514] must use his own latrine at all times, and if travelling must have his own latrine in
each place where he stays. The inland *nkumu* frequently take advantage of this custom
[556] by hiding their accumulated brass rods at the bottom of a freshly dug latrine. Such
hidden wealth will be acquired by an inheritor at the decease of the *nkumu*.

In speaking of himself the *nkumu* never refers to himself by his title but always by his own name.

G24 The couch upon which the *nkumu* sits or reclines during the daytime may not be
352 shared indiscriminately with others, but those permitted to sit upon it at the same
time as the *nkumu* are *maomi*, women, and Batwa. The reservation of this couch for
[562 the use of the *nkumu* is not surprising, but the exceptions are. One explanation given
563] was that women and Batwa are not *bato ba zor*, persons in particular; they do not
count for anything in the social life of the community; they are not really 'people'.
[672] Another explanation was that they do not pay fines, this being tantamount to saying
that they are exempt from laws and therefore cannot break laws even by doing what
would be for others an illegal act. The stool of the *nkumu*, however, has closer
restrictions in the manner of its use. Besides the *nkumu* only two others may sit upon
it, *Nsomo* and *Mpenge*. It is always carried by one of his wives, though not necessarily
by any special one.

G24 The restrictions concerning the food of the *nkumu* are many. He may eat food
262 only in his own house, or, if on a journey, in one given over for his use. He may not
enter another house to partake of food even if invited to do so. Likewise the *nkumu*
may not eat in the forest, or eat or drink anywhere along the road when on a journey,
but must wait until he arrives at a village and has a house at his disposal in order to
partake of food and drink. He never 'sleeps with hunger'; even if a wife or child
should die causing him great sorrow he must partake of food before going to sleep.
[765] The Bonginda *nkumu* must never go into mourning, and death must be ignored by
them, but the inland *nkumu* are permitted to mourn. All food carried to an *nkumu*
must be covered, this rule even applying to water. Food must not be placed in a
basket with high sides (*eboko*), but in a shallow one (*moyala*), and no food that has
been kept overnight in a pot may be eaten by him: swelling of the abdomen will
result. Various foods are taboo, among these all fast-moving snakes, though slow-
[824] moving ones may be eaten; light-coloured palm-nuts may not be eaten, and a variety
of yam known as *monkiki* is shunned, for it is with the tough stems of the *monkiki*
that the dying body of the *nkumu* will be bound to ensure the sitting posture necessary
for burial.

G24 Among regulations roughly classed as social, we have already covered several in
[623] references above, and have referred to the *nkumu* in council. It may be added here that
he is expected to agree with the majority of the councillors and not fall out with them.
The rules affecting the *nsongo* of the *nkumu* are accompanied by severe penalties. There
[687] must not be any fighting; if anger is aroused to the point of blows the antagonists

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must go to the *monkoko* for their fight, this being the location of the houses belonging to the sons of the *nkumu*. The penalty for breaking this law is a fine, and if no fine were forthcoming hanging used to be the alternative. If a quarrel arises elsewhere and one party wishes to avoid fighting, he may retire to the *mongo* and thus be safe. No trees in the *mongo* may be climbed. There are, however, privileged classes exempt from all such rules, and these embrace a good many people. Thus, the mother of twins, twins, Batwa, *mami*, and all members of the *molombo* and *ekopo* are exempt from the laws of the *mongo*. If any of these commit acts which are illegal for those coming under the law, they are not held guilty, but their actions will not be condoned; they will be considered breaches of good conduct, and will be dealt with informally; the parties will be quietly reprimanded, and adjured to observe the proprieties of conduct. For outsiders breaking the laws of the *mongo*, what corresponds to a warrant is necessary. It is necessary to catch the culprit in the act and hale him before the *nkumu*. The *nkumu* himself cannot do this, nor can any of the *ekopo*; it must be done by one of the *molombo*, and so if the *nkumu* sees someone infringing the law he will try to get one of the *molombo* on the spot in a hurry in order to catch the offender.

In war,[1] it is the *molomi o nko* who is most active in preparations, but the *nkumu* will accompany his party to battle, keeping well in the rear, and surrounded by good fighters. He does not wear his *mantolo* but puts on the informal hat. If an *nkumu* were captured, he would never be tortured or killed as were other prisoners, unless he specifically sought such a fate. He could be ransomed, and his captors would beseech him to let his people ransom him, but in many cases an *nkumu* would invite death rather than endure the shame of being yielded up as a prisoner of war.

An *nkumu* is always addressed by a double clap of the hands, and will not reply to anyone rude enough to speak to him first. In answer to the clap he replies with a word of wisdom expressed in an aphorism or proverb. Such a reply, however, is common to all elders, who have their favourite aphorisms ready for any who pay them special honour. Anything the *nkumu* says must be answered not by the customary *nko koko* (even so) which ordinary people use, but with the special word, *hiongo*, which is reserved exclusively for replying to an *nkumu*, and means the same thing.

When the hour of death approaches, an *nkumu* is attended by his Batwa. It is a rule that he must not die a natural death, and near the end, while he is still conscious and can still speak, all 'free men' clear out and leave the Batwa pygmies to their task of tying the *nkumu* very tightly with the fibrous yam vines known as *monkiki*. Often this secure lashing in the sitting posture, known as *ilima*, is sufficient to finish the *nkumu* off, but sometimes the work is expedited by twisting his neck.[2] Then it is announced that he is dead, *nokilwa*, this being in contradistinction to the customary phrase *nokumu mokoko* used of the death of ordinary people. While the latter means

[1] Owing to the lack of tribal cohesion, warfare was not on any considerable scale. The method of warfare consisted in sending groups of young men to fight first, the elders only joining in when one side began to get the worst of the fray. Victors and vanquished in such fights were designated 'husband' and 'wife' respectively, and members of the one group were free to come and go in the villages of the other, and even to help themselves to food. In future wars 'husband' and 'wife' were supposed to combine against their common foes.

[2] Besides *nkumu*, elderly and rich men, fathers and mothers of twins, and twins are buried in the *ilima* or sitting posture, in contradistinction to the *monopo* position which is the recumbent one used for ordinary people and slaves.

literally that the deceased has hanged the heart, the former is used of a tree which leans over and falls from a great cut at its base.

On the announcement of the death, an expert drummer drums out the news. There will be at least four drums of the type known as *lokuku*, and a *nsuge*.[1] The four drums are called by the names, *Epunda*, having the 'biggest voice', that is a deep bass note, *Monggye*, having a higher note, *Mongunda*, a high pitched note, and *Monkuto*, having a very high penetrating note. To these four drums others are added; if the *nkumu* himself did not possess sufficient, they would be borrowed from the surrounding villages, and their notes matched with those of the first three drums, being beaten with them in their turn. *Monkuto* is beaten simultaneously with *Epunda*, giving a rhythmic tattoo. When the news of the death has been sent out on *Epunda*, the funeral drumming commences, as follows:

| | |
|---|---|
| *Mongunda.* | Botiangaau w'Amba lokolo, |
| *Monggye.* | Ntsala ikita, otongomoko, |
| *Epunda.* | Tokund' ilenge nolomi' o nyama, |
| | Ombolekeke nsenge, |
| | Lobanga lokenda nsondo, |
| | Bikeku bilenda lobola. |
| *Nsuge.* | Tobilake nkoi nkonge, |
| | Tobilake nkoi nkonge, &c. |

The English and the interpretation are as follows:

*Mongunda.* A scattering of Amba, the snail. (The mother of twins, always called Amba, here gives her name to the snail because of her prolific progeny, which, upon being introduced to the world, scatter, while the mother dies. So the death of the *nkumu* will cause a scattering of his many wives and children.)

*Monggye.* Feathers fall; pick them up. (That is to say, for your arrow shafts, for if you don't, and come back later, the wind will have scattered them and you won't find them. So while the *nkumu* was alive it was the time for his children to learn his teachings so that when palavers came after his death they would be well acquainted with his wisdom and know how to settle them.)

*Epunda.* We are burying the *ilenge*, husband of animals, You have just eaten *nsenge*, The chin looks up at the ridge pole, The jaw bones look up at the sky. (The *ilenge* is an animal much prized for its fat meat; the *nkumu* always gets his share when it is killed, and the skin is made into carrying straps for infants, and into belts. Batwa are prohibited the use of it for any purpose. It is therefore fitting to liken the *nkumu* to the *ilenge*. *Mesuge* (sing. *lokuge*) is the equivalent of a snack. When a woman beings her cassava from the swamp where it has been soaking for several days, her husband may be too hungry to wait the long hours required to cook it, so to appease his hunger his wife takes a piece or two of the unprepared root, splits it in two, places salt between, wraps it in a *lokundo* leaf and roasts it in the hot ashes, where it is quickly cooked. So the *nkumu* just had time to eat a few *mesuge*; he didn't wait for the big cooking; his life was suddenly cut off.)

*Nsuge.* Don't pull out the leopard's eyelashes. (That is, while he is alive; now he is dead one can disregard his power.)

[1] A *lokuku* is a slit gong made from a hollowed log. Its two notes are produced by striking the two lips of the slit. A *nsuge* is a hollowed log, open at one end, across which is stretched a vellum hide.

This funeral drumming is kept up for a long time, off and on for days, and is very stirring in its rhythm. While it is going on, the elders congregate in an *ekunga*. They fast and have nothing to do with their wives during this time. The *ekpɔ* is mourning, and the *nsimbi* may be likewise mourning, but for the others it is a time of rejoicing, and also of the relaxing of moral restraints. It is an occasion for dancing by both Batwa and 'freemen', the former regarding this as a time for special rejoicing, for the *nkumu* was their master and now he is dead they are no longer under restraint. They are free to take any of their master's goods and even to snatch blankets off the corpse. Men and women do not dance together; the women, taking some of their husbands' weapons, go off in one direction, and the men, arrayed in finery, dance at the other end of the village.

While the *nkumu* is still unburied and the drumming is going on, the *nsimbi* look for a successor among the *ekpɔ*. Often this man will, as we have seen, have already been designated. The *nsimbi*, Batwa, and others in the village make up a party, and attired in war finery go off with their weapons as though after a man they wished to kill. As they go they sing:

*Nkɔmbɔ w'ɔnjɔlɔ ɔlɔmbɔ*
*Wɔ ɔlɔ wɔ ɔlɔ?*
Hawk, thou hast destroyed the nest,
Where art thou going to sleep?

Before catching the real successor they catch one or another in fun, singing this song. The man of course refuses to be *nkumu*, and the point of the song is that because of his refusal the *ekpɔ* no longer fulfils its function of supplying the *nsimbi* with *nkumu* and therefore ceases to be of any use to them. If this man by refusing thus destroys the family nest, where will they sleep?

Finally, after this fun, the real successor is caught, his face daubed with black, and the group sing:

*Bɔlɔ lɔw-ɔɔ, lɔmɔlɔ ɔkɔlɔ.*
The cunning animal is hiding, reveal the tortoise.

Thus the new *nkumu*, like a cunning animal, is hiding, but when discovered, like the tortoise, he will not try to run away. The whole group conducts the new *nkumu* to the *ipumu* and sits all night guarding him. Earlier on the day of the actual interment of the dead *nkumu*, the new one is installed with ceremonies as already described.

On the day the *nkumu* dies his people scatter to other villages to look for slaves for the executions on the day of the burial. Slave-owners or husbands of unwanted wives ask quietly how much money there is for the man or woman, accept the agreed amount, and tell the buyers to go quietly and catch the slave or wife before anything is suspected and an escape is made. In this connexion we may note two classes of wives, *bɔpɔkɔ* and *ekɔtɔ*. A third class, *bɔmbɔ*, acquired by the payment of a very small bride price, was not nearly as common formerly as at present and may be passed by. A *bɔpɔkɔ* was a slave wife acquired by capture in war or stolen. If loved by her husband she will take her place practically on an equality with the members of the village, but she may be killed, for she is her husband's possession, 'his money' is the native expression. An *ekɔtɔ* is a wife for whom a very high bride price has been paid, obliging her family to give wives to the other family in perpetuity, supplying

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a successor to replace a deceased woman, and thus maintaining the balance between the two families. Such wives were seldom killed, for they had relatives who cared for them and would object, and who had the power to do so by refusing to fulfil their obligations and by retaining the bride price already received. The group of men and women gathered together for execution thus comprised males and *bopika* women from the 'free' group (*bato*, as applied to all men and women not Batwa), and Batwa men and women whose owners had consented to their death. It sometimes happened that a man, seeing a woman among this group who took his fancy, might obtain her by paying for her in money or substituting one of his own slaves.

In some cases the executioner, *lomumbe*, was chosen from among the family of the dead *nkumu*, in others he was selected from among the whole group of people over which the *nkumu* held sway. The man having been chosen, the knife is brought out of the house where it has been kept by some elder. This, a blade some sixteen inches in length, two-edged, decorated by alternating longitudinal lines of polished and blackened steel and inserted in a wooden handle, is sharpened on one edge, carefully wrapped in a plantain leaf, and laid away for use on the following day.

At dawn the prisoners are taken to the water and washed to clean them, inland towns accomplishing this purpose by dragging them up and down the village in the dew-drenched grass tied by a liana. The prisoners then are arranged in a V shape, the apex nearest the spot where the *nkumu*'s body is sitting in state. Low seats are made by resting a stick in the forks of two perpendicular ones, and this cross bar is straddled by the victim. His hands are tied behind his back and his head tied to a sapling securely fixed at one end in the ground, the other bent down sufficiently to allow for tying the head with considerable tension on the rope. When all is thus arranged an expert drummer begins to pound out a rhythmic beat, and the ceremony of handing over the knife takes place.

The executioner of the day is dressed in finery but no camwood powder is evident, for it is a time of mourning and not of rejoicing. He wears a hat with many feathers, a vine encircles his waist, and bracelets of the same his arms. Then the man who last occupied the position of executioner comes forward. An elder has already brought the knife wrapped in its leaf and also a heap of ash on a leaf, both of which are placed on the ground. The old executioner picks up the knife while the new one faces him. The former demonstrates with gestures how he used to go about his work, the motions, the attitudes, the fine arts of the task. Even though the executioner of the day may have had previous experience, this part of the ceremony must be gone through. Then, holding the knife aloft, the instructor raises his right leg at right angles to his body, bends it at the knee so that the shin hangs perpendicularly, and the new executioner passes underneath it, returning the same way. He now faces the old executioner, who lays the knife in his own hands, arms outstretched and palms open, the handle resting in his right palm, the blade in his left. The new man, facing his instructor, places his outstretched and open palms on the shoulders of the other, draws his hands down his arms, finally coming to the knife, which, because of its position is thus received, handle in the left hand, blade in the right. Releasing his right-hand grasp of the blade, he stoops, sprinkles the blade with some of the ash, then rubs his right hand in the dirt to remove all slippery sweat. Then still

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grasping the knife with his left hand, with his free right hand he drains a gourd of palm wine to gain courage, hits the nearest victim on the head with the empty gourd, then transfers the knife to his right hand. He is now ready for his work which he proceeds to do methodically, sustained by the heady wine and the rhythm of the drum. When he had finished one of the lines, a pause would be made to bring out the body for burial. Just before this is done an armed band rushes down the path, returns, goes up in the other direction, then returns; this is said by some to ward off any spirits which might be about. The *nkumu* is now brought out by the Batwa slaves.[1] His grave, a circular hole with a crypt in one side of it, its entrance facing west, had been previously prepared. Few people in the Bonginda villages knew or had seen the actual burying place of an *nkumu*. While the corpse was carried to the grave followed by a crowd, the executioner finished his work. Those who stayed behind took the bodies of the decapitated men and women and divided them among all the participants of the funeral who would subsequently devour everything.

Accompanying the funeral procession to the grave were the *ndeli*, one or more men or women who were destined to accompany the *nkumu* to his grave and to the other world beyond. At the burial of an *nkumu* witnessed in 1930 at which the semblances of some of the old rites were carried out, a party of armed men contested the right of the procession to approach the grave, there was a mock battle for a few minutes between two bands of the funeral party, and then the procession gained right of way. At the grave-side the legs and sometimes the arms of one *ndeli* were broken by heavy clubs to prevent him from escaping. Then seated on the ground the body of the *nkumu* would be placed on the knees of this one, whose arms would be placed round the *nkumu* and securely fastened by driving a peg right through both wrists. Sometimes two *ndeli* were thus used. If the number of victims was sufficient, others would be buried alive too, being placed in the grave in the recumbent *monsepa* position, with the corpse on top of them, its weight being sufficient, with the earth filling in the grave, to prevent escape. The *nkumu* was now ready for burial and was placed in the crypt, facing west.[2] The relatives of the *nkumu* approach, they pluck the leaves and stem of a juicy bush known as *mokato* and chewing it, expectorate ceremonially on the body while they address it in language somewhat as follows: 'You are going to leave us now, we are mourning, for you were a good and wise man, your discernment in matters of justice was without parallel, &c. . . . we wish that you may be happy where you go, have many wives, beget many children, lack not for meat. But don't take with you our power to beget children, leave us also some of this wisdom of yours, for what you were, we would be.' This prayer over, the *mantele* would be slipped off the head of the corpse and replaced by the informal hat, all done so dexterously that the bare head was not seen. The entrance to the

[1] The body was supposed to have remained in state for seven to nine days, but actually it was buried privately soon after death, a dummy being set up with the *mantele* on its head, and the succeeding ceremonies being conducted with only the dummy in the place of the actual body. The inland villages however did allow the body to remain unburied for the long period, the wives being forced to keep watch in the same house. The Bonginda buried their *nkumu* generally in their houses at the spot where they had been accustomed to rest, burying the dummy at some other spot further off.

[2] All burials have particular regard to this east-west position, those buried in the recumbent position having the feet to the west. The native explanation is that this allows the spirit of the departed to follow the path of the sinking sun.

crypt would then be barred by mats in order to leave it as a hollow chamber, and the hole leading down to it filled in with earth.

For a month or two after the burial the festivities and orgies continued. Women would be hanged to create some diversion, but those hanged were not eaten. Decapitations would continue. According to the informants only slaves brought in from a distance would have to be tied to prevent their escape. The slave members of the household of the dead *nkumu* would await their turn stoically, content to die that they might accompany their master in his journey to the land of spirits. This may be true but scarcely seems possible. Still another diversion in the funeral orgies was killing in the manner known as *etumbu*. If some man who had a slave did not wish him to be hanged or beheaded, he might give him for this other method. As the weeks slipped by, such a one, his life having apparently been spared, would suppose that all was safe and that there was little chance of his being taken, and, thus emboldened, would, instead of keeping at a safe distance, join the crowd to watch a beheading. His death would be prearranged. At the moment of beheading a victim, someone would drive a spear into the unsuspecting man, the whole crowd then using spears and knives to stab and slash until he fell. Some might be tortured to death by being buried up to the neck and left thus exposed to the hot sun without food or water until death intervened, but this was not a common practice at such funerals.

The termination of the dead *nkumu*'s affairs took place when the division of the inheritance was made, a long and complicated process.

Such were the old days before European penetration. The advent of the white man half a century ago was the beginning of the end. The ceremonies had to be given up, though reluctantly. Occasionally now goats are beheaded in place of human victims, and many of the younger generation find that, even so, the sight is more than they can endure, and they seek refuge elsewhere. *Nkumu* are not anxious for the honours. They find little or no respect paid to them by the government officials and this is a distinct obstacle to their obtaining honour from their own people. When the *nkumu* resident in the village adjacent to the mission station died, one of the Natives was asked who would be next. The reply was that probably no one would appear as a successor. Asked why, he answered, 'There are too many trousers.' He meant that too many were adopting the ways of the white man to make the inauguration of another *nkumu* a success. In his one useful function, that of judge, the paramount chief now takes his place, cases tried must be recorded by a clerk of the court, and fines paid into the treasury of the chieftaincy. With such a state of affairs the old ways drop into desuetude, and the younger generation grow up knowing less of the ways of their fathers as the years pass.